



PARTNERS FOR RURAL TRAFFIC SAFETY: A MODEL PROGRAM SUPPORTING THE BUCKLE UP AMERICA CAMPAIGN



U.S. Department
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**National Highway
Traffic Safety
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Lower occupant protection usage rates have contributed greatly to the disproportionate number of traffic-related deaths and injuries occurring in rural communities. To address this problem, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) have worked together since 1996 to demonstrate the effectiveness of a community development/action program to promote rural traffic safety by implementing local traffic safety campaigns. The program is set forth in a NHTSA publication titled *Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit*.

In July 2002, NHTSA extended a Cooperative Agreement with NRHA to continue its promotion of the *Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit*. The association, working with State Offices of Rural Health in Arizona, Colorado, Michigan, and North Dakota, identified 16 rural communities in which to implement traffic safety campaigns. The project was designed so the local campaigns would coincide with the safety belt *Click It or Ticket* mobilizations under the national Buckle Up America campaign. The State Offices of Rural Health administered grants to each community to cover the costs associated with campaign implementation and the community development process.

An integral part of the project was the formation of teams in those States to provide technical assistance to the local communities. Team members were drawn from health care organizations, traffic safety offices, law enforcement, cooperative extension units, and other pertinent organizations. As part of the Cooperative Agreement, State teams participated in a training-of-trainers program on how to use the *Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit* model. They, in turn, provided training and technical assistance to team leaders from the 16 communities.

Partnerships for Rural Traffic Safety

In addition to increasing safety belt use, the project demonstrated the important role that rural health and safety professionals can play in promoting traffic safety, specifically occupant protection, in rural communities. It also reinforced the usefulness of having rural health and safety organizations administer traffic safety grants in rural communities.

In all communities, leaders strongly acknowledged the comprehensive nature of the *Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit* and the benefits of implementing a safety belt campaign. In 15 of the 16 communities, safety belt use increased significantly. Seven sites reported an increase of more than 30 percent, and two additional sites reported an increase of more than 20 percent. Each community conducted pre- and post-observational surveys following guidelines provided in the *Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit*. The following chart presents survey results for all of the communities.

Safety Belt Use Survey Results

Community	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Percent Change	Percentage Point Change
Colorado				
Durango	66.1%	87.2%	31.9%	21.1
Alamosa	42.6%	63.5%	49%	20.9
Rocky Ford	44%	61%	38.6%	17
Morgan County	57.8%	67.4%	16.6%	9.6
North Dakota				
Dickinson	47.8%	53.6%	12.1%	5.8
Williston*	48%	57.9%	20.6%	9.9
Devils Lake*	28.4%	38.9%	36.9%	10.9
Mountrail County*	62.4%	82.2%	31.7%	19.8
Michigan				
Manistique	65%	86.6%	33.2%	21.6
Pigeon**	62.2%	76.6%	23.1%	14.4
Standish	74.2%	78.2%	5.3%	4
Kalkaska	85%	84%	-1.1%	-1
Arizona				
Tohono O'odham Nation***	45.7%	66%	44.4%	20.3
Average Rates	56%	69.5%	26.3%	13.4

* These communities had only five observation sites.

** These communities sent only results, not raw tables.

*** For reporting purposes, all four sites are treated as one community because of small populations.

Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit

The kit provides community leaders with a step-by-step approach for undertaking a month-long community campaign to increase safety belt use and to support enforcement of safety belt, child passenger safety, and other traffic safety laws. It includes:

- A self-instructional curriculum on how to conduct a community development/action project;

- Strategies for planning and conducting a community campaign that includes enforcement;
- Methods for measuring campaign effectiveness; and
- Resources for conducting the campaign.

The program is characterized by the following eight process steps that follow the basic tenets of community organization and direct citizen involvement:

1. Identification of leadership.
2. Organizing and recruiting the community-based partner team.
3. Partner team orientation and training.
4. Assessment of community wants, needs, values, and traffic safety issues.
5. Selection of project interventions.
6. Planning and gathering resources.
7. Implementing the 30-day campaign.
8. Evaluating the impact of the intervention.

Upon completing their local campaigns, community team leaders and State team coordinators were interviewed to obtain impressions of the project and their experiences. Their responses are a rich source of information, providing insights, observations, and useful ideas about the *Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit* and the benefits of organizing rural communities to support occupant protection.

Lessons Learned From State and Community Leaders

Three key lessons were gleaned from the interviews: (1) Allocating sufficient time for planning and organizing; (2) selecting effective campaign activities; and (3) broadening involvement within the community for future campaigns.

Allocating Sufficient Time for Planning and Community Organization

State and community team leaders commented on the need for sufficient time for program planning and community organization. State leaders specifically mentioned the need for time to:

- Familiarize themselves with the program;
- Identify the right community – one that was committed to implementing the program; and
- Provide the necessary technical support.

Although the kit contains a self-instructional curriculum, State coordinators felt the time they spent in special training sessions for themselves and with community leaders was very valuable. These sessions allowed them to become familiar with the elements of the *Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit*, get to know the local team leaders, and gain insight into the needs of each community. Local team leaders also acknowledged the benefits of training before program implementation. They felt the training gave them additional time to study the kit and truly understand the requirements of the program.

Two other time-related factors raised by community team leaders were the need for additional time to mobilize the community and the time of year the campaign was implemented. Many community team leaders felt their campaigns would have benefited greatly had there been more

time to gather support from a broader spectrum of community members. In some instances, communities had existing coalitions that willingly took on the program. However, local leaders who had to form new teams acknowledged their desire for more time to organize and recruit team members.

In several communities, bad weather interfered with the scheduling of training sessions and community meetings. As a result, team leaders were unable to implement the campaign when originally planned. Some community leaders felt that their campaigns might have been better served had they had time to schedule events around the school calendar.

Selecting Effective Campaign Activities

The *Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit* provides an extensive list of public information and educational activities that communities can undertake to reach out and deliver messages



to the community. The majority of respondents mentioned the benefits of using a multifaceted, multidisciplinary approach to message development and delivery, one that is appropriate to each business, civic, and municipal sector. They also identified the importance of involving the media at the start of the program.

At the top of the list of effective campaign activities were using the roll-over simulator machine (safety belt convincer) and conducting child safety seat checks. Leaders felt that these hands-on, interactive events helped to drive home messages

about the benefits of safety belts and child safety seats. Several communities identified the benefits of making school presentations, along with the use of Vince and Larry®, the NHTSA crash test dummies.

Also noted as effective campaign activities were public service advertising and signage. Many communities placed safety belt ads on banners, billboards, and road signs. One community placed ads on grain elevators. Another community had State troopers wear specially designed Buckle Up T-shirts instead of uniforms at special events. They found that wearing T-shirts made the officers less intimidating and made the message appear more positive.

Broadening Community Involvement

When asked to reflect on what they would do differently for future campaigns, the majority of State and local team leaders focused their responses on the need to broaden community involvement. Two actions mentioned in this regard were reaching out to senior citizens and increasing participation by law enforcement. They also identified a need for increasing media exposure, which would require greater involvement from local media professionals.

As previously noted, many community team leaders felt that their campaigns would have benefited from more school involvement during the planning stages of the program. When considering future campaigns, they noted that with more time and resources they would develop better student presentations and schedule events that coincided with the school calendar.

The need to broaden community involvement was especially relevant for State and community team leaders in Arizona. They learned an important lesson about the importance of community involvement and decisionmaking in their work with the Tohono O'odham Nation. Although the Tohono O'odham Police Department was involved in the project from its inception, after the Arizona Rural Health Office (RHO) received its funding, staff had to reinstate the project by visiting every district (with a community leader from the Nation) to present the project and receive signoff.

The RHO coordinator also had to present the project to the Nation's Legislative Council, providing answers to questions and waiting for approval from all council members. An election resulted in the replacement of many key council and district members, which further delayed project startup. All of these processes required additional time and resources to complete. However, once all of the approvals were obtained, the NRHA training was undertaken successfully and the four communities within the Nation began their campaigns.

An Ongoing Need to Promote Occupant Protection in Rural Communities

Although traffic and road congestion are minimal in rural communities, NHTSA data shows that people are twice as likely to be killed while driving on a rural roadway as on an urban roadway. Two factors affecting crash risk are directly related to the number of miles traveled by people who live in rural communities. One factor is the relative scarcity of public transportation; the other is the greater distances between destinations. A third factor affecting crash risk is the greater likelihood that rural residents will be traveling on a roadway that has a speed limit of 55 mph or higher.

NHTSA data also has shown that people killed in rural crashes were more likely to have been ejected from their vehicles. This fact suggests that either they were not wearing safety belts or they were traveling at such high speeds that their safety belts could not prevent them from being ejected. The need for ongoing occupant protection programs in rural communities is clearly established by all of these factors, as well as the high cost that communities, families, and individuals pay when people are killed and injured in traffic crashes.

For More Information About Traffic Safety in Rural Communities

Go to the NHTSA web site at www.nhtsa.gov to find the following documents with additional information on traffic safety in rural communities:

McGinnis, P. and Quick, R. L. *Partners for Rural Traffic Safety Action Kit*. Cooperative Agreement of the National Rural Health Association and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 809 299, August 2001.

Safety Belts and Rural Communities -- 2005 Report. NHTSA, DOT HS 809 931, May 2005.

Traffic Safety Facts 2002 Data--Rural/Urban Comparison, National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NHTSA, DOT HS 809 739.